

Small Group Guide: The Story of Joseph - Negotiation

Week 11 | Genesis 44:18-34

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker

Prayer: Ask God to open hearts to His transformative work and give wisdom for honest conversation.

Icebreaker: Share a time when someone showed you unexpected mercy or grace. How did it impact you?

Sermon Recap (5-10 minutes)

Joseph's brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin. After being treated with kindness and grace, they face another test when Benjamin is accused of stealing Joseph's cup. Judah, who once sold Joseph into slavery, now offers himself as a substitute for Benjamin. This sermon explores the profound heart transformation God worked in Judah—from bitterness and betrayal to compassion and self-sacrifice.

Central Question: Is it ever too late for heart change, or to right a wrong?

Discussion Questions

Section 1: Understanding Judah's Betrayal (15 minutes)

1. **Read Genesis 37:23-28.** What emotions or motivations do you think drove Judah and his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery?
2. How did Jacob's favoritism contribute to the brothers' bitterness? In what ways can parental favoritism or family dysfunction create lasting wounds?
3. The sermon states: "A quick solution to a very complex problem." How have you seen people (or yourself) try to solve complex emotional problems with quick, destructive decisions?
4. What unresolved anger or resentment have you witnessed grow into bitterness in someone's life? What were the consequences?

Section 2: The Nature of Bitterness (15 minutes)

5. **Read Hebrews 12:15.** The sermon defines bitterness as "an intense emotional state of anger, resentment, and disappointment that rises from perceived injustice or betrayal." How does this definition resonate with your experience?
6. Tim Keller says, "Worry is not believing God will get it right, and bitterness is believing that God got it wrong." Discuss this statement. When have you struggled with believing God "got it wrong" in your life?
7. The sermon compares bitterness to "drinking poison and expecting the one who hurt you to die." Why is bitterness ultimately self-destructive?
8. How does bitterness "spring up" unexpectedly? What are early warning signs we should watch for in our own hearts?

Section 3: Judah's Transformation (20 minutes)

9. **Read Genesis 44:18-31.** What evidence do you see of genuine transformation in Judah's speech? What specifically has changed?
10. The sermon notes we don't get to see all the details of Judah's transformation journey. What do we know happened (his encounter with Tamar in Genesis 38)? How does God use our failures to humble and restore us?
11. **Read Ephesians 4:25-32.** Paul talks about "replacement"—replacing destructive patterns with godly ones. What practical examples does he give? How does this apply to overcoming bitterness?
12. Judah went from ignoring Joseph's pleas for mercy to pleading for Benjamin's life. What does this teach us about God's power to transform hearts?

Section 4: Judah's Sacrifice & Christ (15 minutes)

13. **Read Genesis 44:32-34.** Judah offers himself as a substitute for Benjamin. How does this foreshadow Christ's sacrifice for us?
 14. The sermon states: "God can take a heart of stone and make it beat for him." **Read Ezekiel 36:25-27.** What does God promise to do in this passage? How have you experienced this in your own life?
 15. How does understanding God's grace toward us (while we were sinners) help us extend grace to those who have hurt us?
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Key Takeaways

1. **Bitterness is a spiritual poison** that starts small but can overtake our entire lives if left unchecked.
 2. **God specializes in heart transformation.** No one is beyond His redemptive power—even those who have committed terrible wrongs.
 3. **True transformation is evidenced by compassion** for those we once resented and willingness to sacrifice for others.
 4. **Judah's substitutionary offer points to Jesus,** who laid down His life for sinners who hated Him.
 5. **God's timeline for transformation varies,** but He is patient and persistent in His work in us.
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Practical Applications

Personal Reflection (to be done before next meeting):

- **Bitterness Inventory:** Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any roots of bitterness in your heart. Write down:
 - Who am I angry or resentful toward?
 - What perceived injustice am I holding onto?
 - How has this bitterness affected my relationship with God and others?
- **Replacement Strategy:** Using Ephesians 4:25-32, identify one destructive pattern and one godly replacement:
 - Instead of _____ (destructive pattern), I will _____ (godly replacement).

Group Accountability:

- **Share one area** where you're struggling with anger, resentment, or bitterness (as you feel comfortable).
- **Pray specifically** for one another's transformation in these areas.
- **Check in next week:** How did God work in this area of your life?

Action Steps:

1. **Memorize Ephesians 4:31-32** this week as a weapon against bitterness.
 2. **Take one step toward reconciliation** with someone you've been bitter toward (if appropriate and safe).
 3. **Practice gratitude:** Each day this week, write down three things you're thankful for—gratitude is an antidote to bitterness.
 4. **Listen to "Grace Alone" by Dustin Kensrue** (mentioned in the sermon) and reflect on God's transforming grace in your life.
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Closing Exercise (10 minutes)

Silent Reflection: Give everyone 3-5 minutes of silence to ask God:

- "Where do I need heart transformation?"
- "What bitterness am I holding onto?"
- "How can I show mercy to others as You've shown mercy to me?"

Sharing (Optional): Invite anyone who feels led to share what God revealed.

Prayer: Close by praying Ezekiel 36:26 over one another: "God, give us new hearts. Remove our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh that beat for You."

Preparation for Next Week

Read Genesis 45:1-15 and consider: How does Joseph's revelation to his brothers demonstrate the "bigger picture" God has been working toward?
